

United States Senate

October 17, 2014

The Honorable Sylvia Burwell
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20221

Dear Secretary Burwell:

Since Chicago's O'Hare Airport (ORD) is one of the five airports in the U.S. which receives up to 150 passengers per day from West Africa, I am writing with concern for a lack of coordination between the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the health care personnel in Illinois. Our residents need confidence that the CDC is coordinating with our first responders and hospitals and have clearly defined procedures in place to intercept and treat all infected individuals, should there be a case of Ebola detected at O'Hare. In fact, all five airports, O'Hare International, Kennedy International, Washington Dulles International, Hartsfield-Jackson International and Newark Liberty International, should have regional priority.

O'Hare International Airport started screening passengers traveling from affected areas on October 16, 2014. The current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which determines the local hospital where potential Ebola patients are sent, emphasized proximity to the airport instead of preparedness, bioterror infrastructure and capability. There should be a re-assessment and explanation for a new MOU with consideration of which hospital is best equipped to treat to an Ebola victim.

As part of an updated MOU, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) should organize a team to coordinate with Illinois hospitals ensure the staff is prepared to treat infected individuals without risking their own health.

O'Hare is one of the busiest airports in the country, with travelers arriving from West Africa, and has already been identified by CDC as a potential entry point of Ebola into the United States. As one of the five identified screening airports, priority should be given to train and prepare our area health care personnel for the potential need to treat an Ebola patient once he or she passes through O'Hare.

I strongly encourage you to reevaluate the MOU and ask that you deploy a team to Chicago to ensure that the medical staff there is fully prepared to prevent an outbreak. Your timely response is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Mark Kirk
United States Senator